

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A light diffusing plate comprising a birefringent film containing dispersed therein minute regions differing from the birefringent film in birefringent characteristics,

wherein the minute regions comprises a thermoplastic liquid-crystal polymer, and difference in refractive index between the birefringent film and the minute regions in a direction perpendicular to an axis direction in which a linearly polarized light has a maximum transmittance,  $\Delta n^1$ , is 0.03 or larger and that in said axis direction,  $\Delta n^2$ , is not larger than 80% of the  $\Delta n^1$ .

2. A light diffusing plate according to claim 1, wherein said thermoplastic liquid-crystal polymer is a thermoplastic branched liquid-crystal polymer having side chains each containing a segment represented by general formula (I): -Y-Z-, wherein Y is one of a polymethylene chain, a polyoxymethylene chain and a polyoxyethylene chain branching from a main chain and Z is a para-substituted cyclic compound.

3. A light diffusing plate according to claim 1, wherein the minute regions are dispersedly contained in said birefringent film by phase separation and each has a length in the  $\Delta n^1$  direction of from 0.05 to 500  $\mu\text{m}$ .

4. A light diffusing plate according to claim 2, wherein the minute regions are dispersedly contained in said birefringent film by phase separation and each has a length in the  $\Delta n^1$  direction of from 0.05 to 500  $\mu\text{m}$ .

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5. A light diffusing plate according to claim 1, wherein two or more birefringent films which are superposed on each other so that the  $\Delta n^1$  directions of each of the birefringent films are parallel to those for one or two of the adjacent layer.

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6. A light diffusing plate according to claim 2, wherein two or more birefringent films which are superposed on each other so that the  $\Delta n^1$  directions of each of the birefringent films are parallel to those for one or two of the adjacent layer.

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7. A light diffusing plate according to claim 3, wherein two or more birefringent films which are superposed on each other so that the  $\Delta n^1$  directions of each of the birefringent films are parallel to those for one or two of the adjacent layer.

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8. A light diffusing plate according to claim 4, wherein two or more birefringent films which are superposed on each other so that the  $\Delta n^1$  directions of each of the birefringent films are parallel to those for one or two of the adjacent layer.

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9. An optical element comprising a multilayer structure which comprises the light diffusing plate of any one of claims 1 to 8 and at least one of a polarizing plate and a phase plate.

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10. An optical element according to claim 9, wherein a transmission axis of the polarizing plate is parallel to the  $\Delta n^2$  direction for the light diffusing plate.

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11. A liquid-crystal display comprising a liquid-crystal cell and disposed on one or each side thereof the light diffusing plate of any one of claims 1 to 8.

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12. A liquid-crystal display comprising a liquid-crystal cell and disposed on one or each side thereof the optical element of claim 9.

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13. A liquid-crystal display comprising a liquid-crystal cell and disposed on one or each side thereof the optical element of claim 10.